



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS  
HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION

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**EXPLORING AN AUTOMOBILE AGE COMMUNITY  
ON PROVIDENCE'S EAST SIDE**

The Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission is pleased to announce the start of a new survey and documentation project on the East Side of Providence. Over the next few months, a professional historic preservation consultant will conduct fieldwork and prepare an inventory in the Blackstone Boulevard-Cole Avenue area. The project is jointly sponsored by the City of Providence, the Providence Preservation Society (PPS), and the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission (RIHPHC). Funds for the project are made available by the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, under a Certified Local Government Grant administered by the RIHPHC.

The proposed survey area includes several hundred buildings from the Blackstone Blvd area west to Cole Avenue, and from Old Tannery Road to President Avenue. Most are residences dating from the early to mid-20th century.

In recent years, the RIHPHC has nominated several late-19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century districts on the East Side to the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register is the Federal Government's official list of properties throughout the United States whose historical and architectural significance makes them worthy of preservation. In addition to honoring a property

for its contribution to local, state, or national history, listing on the National Register provides additional benefits. It results in special consideration during the planning of Federal or federally assisted projects and makes properties eligible for Federal and Rhode Island tax benefits for historic rehabilitation projects. Owners of private property listed on the National Register are free to maintain, manage, or dispose of their property as they choose.

There are several National Register districts near the new survey area. These include the Freeman Parkway, Blackstone Boulevard Realty Plat, Blackstone Park, Elmgrove Gardens, Summit, and Wayland historic districts. The historical themes that unite these neighborhoods are Providence's early 20<sup>th</sup>-century development, the spread of streetcar service and city utilities, the advent of the automobile, and changing social character of the city's neighborhoods. All of these forces encouraged real estate developers to acquire, plat, and build residential subdivisions on the East Side. While single-family houses with garages (or converted carriage houses) are most typical, these districts also include multi-family houses, apartment buildings, commercial buildings, and architecturally significant houses of worship.

"The Blackstone-Cole area is notable for the quality of its residential architecture and its suburban ambience," said Edward F. Sanderson, Executive Director of the RIHPHC.

"Development of the area was stimulated in part by construction of Blackstone Boulevard over one hundred years ago, and the pattern of building was affected by land—such as Cole Farm—that continued to 1948. This survey and documentation project will record the historic buildings and landscape qualities that define the neighborhood's special character."

Professional historic preservation consultant Kathryn Cavanaugh will advise the Providence Preservation Society and RI Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission on whether any part of the survey area may qualify for the National Register. She will undertake photography and

architectural fieldwork in the neighborhood and complete archival research to determine if parts of the neighborhood meet the eligibility criteria for the National Register.

Sanderson noted that, “Although most Rhode Islanders recognize the landmarks of our state’s colonial and 19<sup>th</sup>-century history, the 20<sup>th</sup> century still feels like the recent past. Studies like the Blackstone-Cole project identify more recent historic places and broaden our understanding of the evolution of the built environment. The RIHPHC is committed to documenting the full scope of Rhode Island’s development, and we look forward to sharing the results of the Blackstone-Cole project.”

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